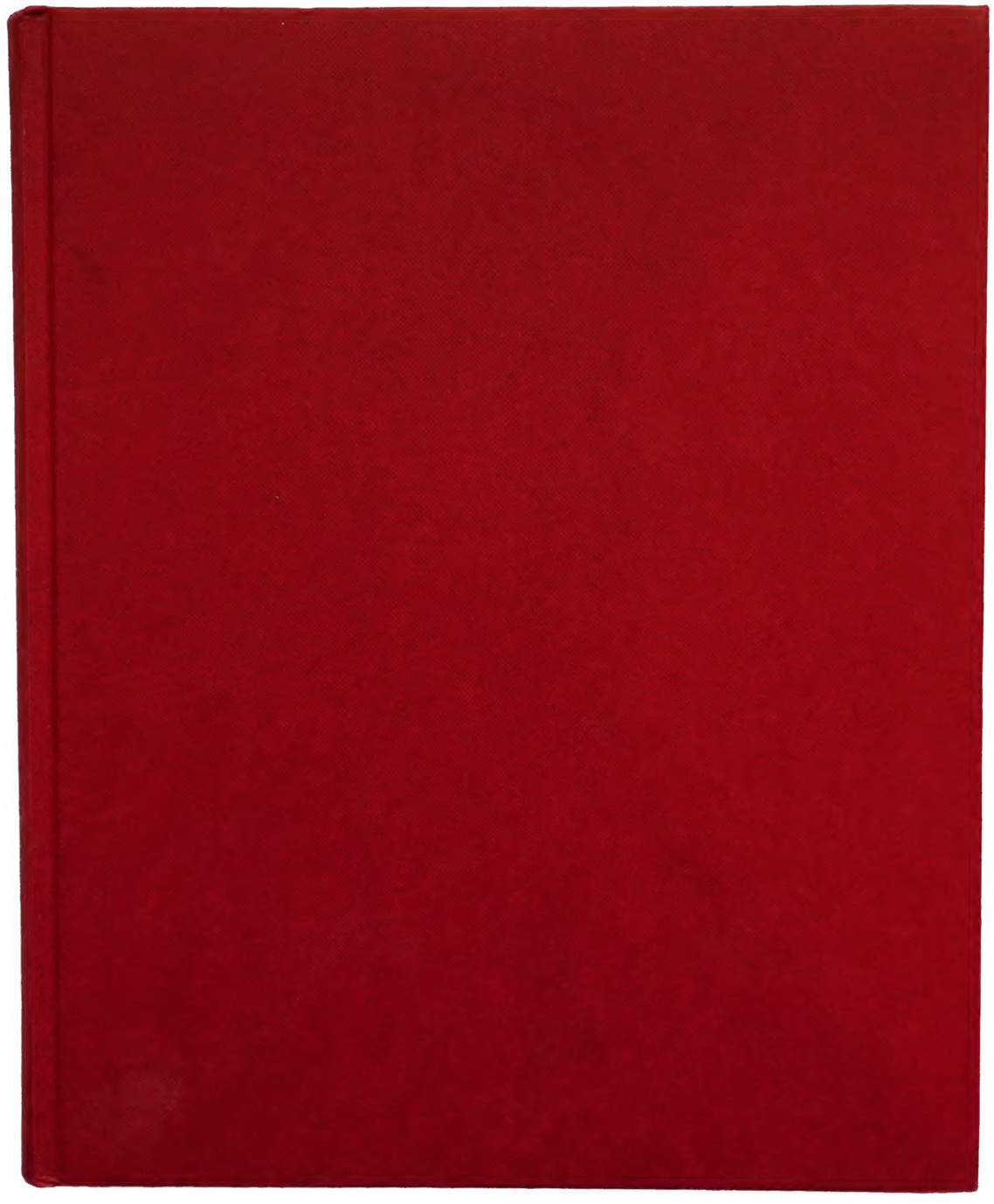

Nan at Myrtle Street, Boston 1972. Photo: David Armstrong

NAN GOLDIN

THE OTHER SIDE

Edited with David Armstrong
and Walter Keller

Published in association with
the D.A.A.D. Artists-in-
Residence-Programme, Berlin

Scalo Publishers
New York–Zurich–Berlin

Every minute
Somewhere
In the world
Parents are
Finding their
Children in drag

RENE RICARD

This is a book about beauty.
And about my love for my friends. I first saw them – Ivy and Naomi and Colette – crossing the bridge near Morgan Memorial Thriftshop in downtown Boston. They were the most gorgeous creatures I'd ever seen. I was immediately infatuated. I followed them and shot some super-8 film. That was in 1972. It was the beginning of an obsession that has lasted twenty years.

Soon after, I met them again through David, my closest friend, who had started to do drag. From my first night at The Other Side – *the* drag queen bar of Boston in the '70s – I came to life. I fell in love with one of the queens and within a few months moved in with Ivy and another friend. I was eighteen and felt like I was a queen too. Completely devoted to my friends, they became my whole world. Part of my worship of them involved photographing them. I wanted to pay homage, to show them how beautiful they were. I never saw them as men dressing as women, but as something entirely different – a third gender that made more sense than either of the other two. I accepted them as they saw themselves; I had no desire to unmask them with my camera. Since my early teens, I'd lived by an Oscar Wilde saying, that you are who you pretend to be. I had enormous respect for the courage my friends had in recreating themselves according to their fantasies.

There was a wide range of gender identity among my friends. Several were pre-op transsexuals; others, like Ivy, never wanted to be women but were into the art of glamor, into fashion. For Naomi, gender was completely malleable: some days she was Naomi, other days he was Frankie. There were several other girls who hung around the queens in those days: Pamela and Naomi were lovers, off and on, and from what I've heard they are still together now, twenty years later; another girl, Susan, was once arrested for female impersonation! During that time I looked in the library for anything written about women who fall in love with drag queens. I found one chapter in an abnormal psychology book from the 1950s which said that we were so perverse as to be unclassifiable.

During the two years we lived together I took pictures of my friends almost daily. When we picked up the 3x5 snapshots at the corner drugstore there was always a competition to see who had the most pictures of themselves in the pile. We went to The Other Side every night except Tuesday, even on Thursday for the bologna buffet. On Monday nights the queens got into full drag for the Beauty Parade where Boston's legendary M.C., Sylvia Sydney, dished the audience while the queens modeled and a jury awarded trophies to the most glamorous contestants. Those were the days of

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qualludes and the nights of White Russians and Golden Cadillacs. To survive, some of the queens collected welfare, some turned tricks, others sewed costumes for each other or sold antique clothes they found at thriftshops. There were no job opportunities in those days for people who lived in drag; they were even ostracized by most of the gay male community. I supported myself in a Beacon Hill pharmacy serving pills to blue-blooded ex-debutantes. My aspiration was to be a fashion photographer; my goal was to put the queens on the cover of Vogue. I started taking a photo course at night and had my first show in a basement gallery in Cambridge, Mass. in 1973. All my models came to the opening in full drag.

In 1974 I moved out and started going to art school full time. After learning more about technique and equipment, I went back to photograph my old world. But it didn't work: I was an outsider, it was no longer my home.

In the 1980s two of my closest friends were transsexual. Both were completely absorbed into their gender choices as women and each married her boyfriend. One was a top model in Paris in the mid-'80s and won Girl of the Year. They had my deepest admiration for going to the point of surgical recreation. One of these friends once described to me from her own experience the difference between a male and a female orgasm. That seems to me an enviable wealth of experience to have in one lifetime – to have been in the world in two different skins. But that same friend who changed sex from male to female in her early twenties told me she sometimes regretted the surgery because she felt it was, in part, a way to try to fit into normal society's version of gender, and it takes more courage to remain a queen.

I met a whole new crowd of queens in N.Y. in 1990, again through my friend David and our friend Bruce. My old obsession was reawakened. I developed one fixation after another. I photographed my new friends constantly – at Wigstock, the bars, the balls, and the weekly dinner parties at Bruce's where I gave slide shows for everyone in the pictures. My relationship to these queens is different; now I am the older one. The social setting has also changed – they are not as marginalized as they were in the '70s but are more incorporated into and appreciated by the gay community. Many have jobs – in bars and clubs, as make-up artists and hairdressers; some are models in Vogue. An old friend saw my new photos and said she felt my "shock of recognition" in the pictures. I was home again.

After years of experiencing and photographing the struggle of the two genders with their codes and definitions and their difficulties in relating to each other, it was liberating to meet people who had crossed these gender boundaries. Most people get scared when they can't categorize others – by race, by age, and, most of all, by gender.

It takes nerve to walk down the street when you fall between the cracks. Some of my friends shift genders daily – from boy to girl and back again. Some are transsexual before or after surgery, and among them some live entirely as women while others openly identify themselves as transsexuals. Others dress up only for stage performances and live as gay boys by day. And still others make no attempt at all to fit in anywhere, but live in a gender-free zone, flaunting their third sex status.

The plague of AIDS has affected this community. One of my closest friends in the pictures from the '70s died a few years ago and one of the beauties in the recent pictures, a few weeks ago. Due in large part to the AIDS crisis, the attitudes of my friends in the '90s have shifted. The previous glorification of the glamor of self-destruction and substance abuse has been replaced with a will to survive. Some of the queens in these pictures are in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction.

In the last few years I've learned more about the varieties of desire that can't be compartmentalized, that can't be defined as either gay or straight. I've met other women who are infatuated with queens and transsexuals but I still haven't found a definition. There is a sense of freedom in having a desire that has never been labeled. As a bisexual person, for me the third gender seems to be the ideal. I've met Kai Kai queens who fall in love with each other. Some of my friends now have boyfriends. These are not the kind of affairs built upon desperate feeding like those with most of the johns who hang around transvestites. These are real relationships based on mutual desire and respect.

While living in Berlin in 1992 I had the opportunity to travel to Asia with a German filmmaker to work on a documentary about male prostitution and gay culture in Southeast Asia. We spent one month in Manila and three weeks in Bangkok. I made new friends among the many young queens I met. I spent my nights in the bars where they worked, modeling, singing, dancing, sometimes stripping, sometimes entertaining customers. In Manila I met a queen who ate fire, contortionists, and saw a long skit that involved two men beating up queens for comic relief. One friend took me home to meet her family where she and her boyfriend live with her parents and brother and nieces and nephews. Another teenage queen supports her parents and five siblings in the provinces with the money she makes from her shows. These queens haven't been alienated from their families in the way most of the queens I know in the western world have been. In Bangkok the bar workers I met were aware of AIDS and practised safe sex, but in Manila, due to the influence of the Catholic church, I encountered widespread denial about the realities of AIDS. The bar Second Tip in Bangkok reminded me of The Other Side. The queens were beautiful, the shows were lavish

productions with numerous costumes. The older queens didn't retire; they managed the bar and performed comedy routines on stage. In Manila they called me "mother," in Bangkok "sexy grandma."

The pictures in this book are not of people suffering gender dysphoria but rather expressing gender euphoria. This book is about new possibilities and transcendence. The people in these pictures are truly revolutionary; they are the real winners of the battle of the sexes because they have stepped out of the ring.

NAN GOLDIN, BERLIN, DECEMBER 29, 1992

Dedicated to KENNY ANGELICO, my first love from The Other Side
DAVID ARMSTRONG and BRUCE FULLER, who showed me the way
DAVID WOJNAROWICZ, who lit the path
ALF BOLD, who saved my eyes

David at Grove Street, Boston 1972.

Roommate in the kitchen, Boston 1972.

Ivy wearing a fall, Boston 1973.

Roommate onstage at The Other Suite, Boston 1972

Naomi in the audience, Boston 1975

16

Naomi and Colette gossiping, Boston 1973

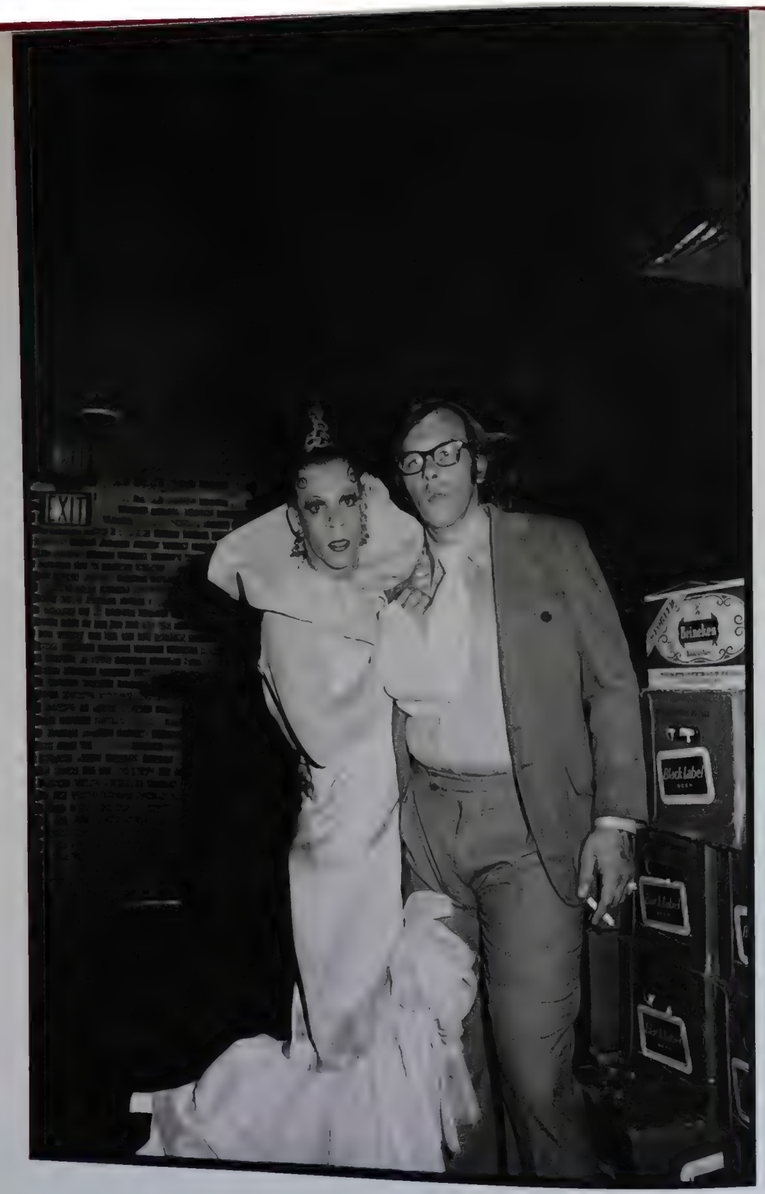
17

Colette modeling in the Beauty Parade, Boston 1973

Naomi and Marlene on the balcony, Boston 1972

Pat and Denine in the Profile Room, Boston 1973

Christmas at The Other Side Boston 1952



Crystal with a friend, Boston 1973.

Marcia, Connie and Nancy on the street, Boston 1973.

Roommate in her chair, Boston 1952

Ivy with Marilyn, Boston 1975.

Naomi under the palm tree Boston 1975

Ivy with wigstand, Boston 1975

Colette at home, Boston 1974

Marlene at home with Venus de Milo, Boston 1974

Pamela and Naomi. Boston 1972.

Sisters. Boston 1973.

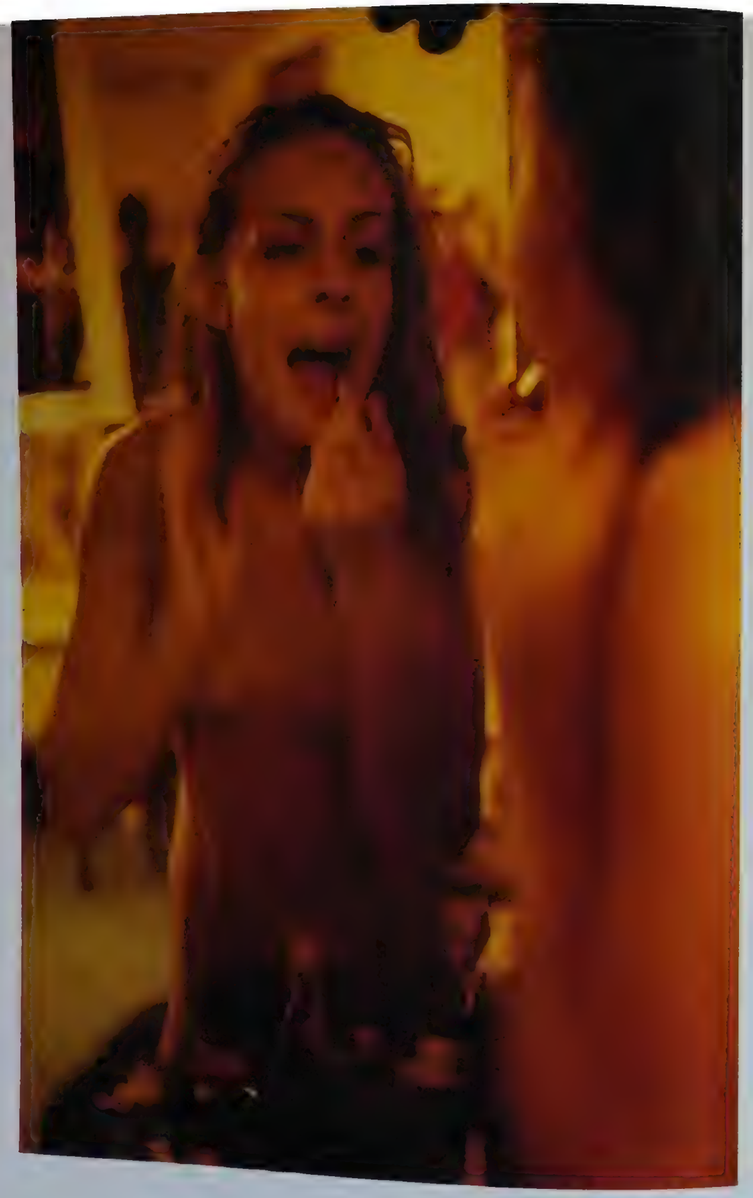
Roommate's back, Boston 1975

Ivy in the Boston Garden, Boston 1973.

Ivy in the Boston Garden back Boston 1973

Greer | New York 1981 1987

Greer in her tub, NYC 1985



Greer at home, NYC 1985.

Greer in a babydoll dress, NYC 1981

Greer's and Paul's wedding NYC 1987

Greer at Einstein's, NYC 1987

Greer in the car, New Jersey 1986

Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! in the bathroom, NYC 1991

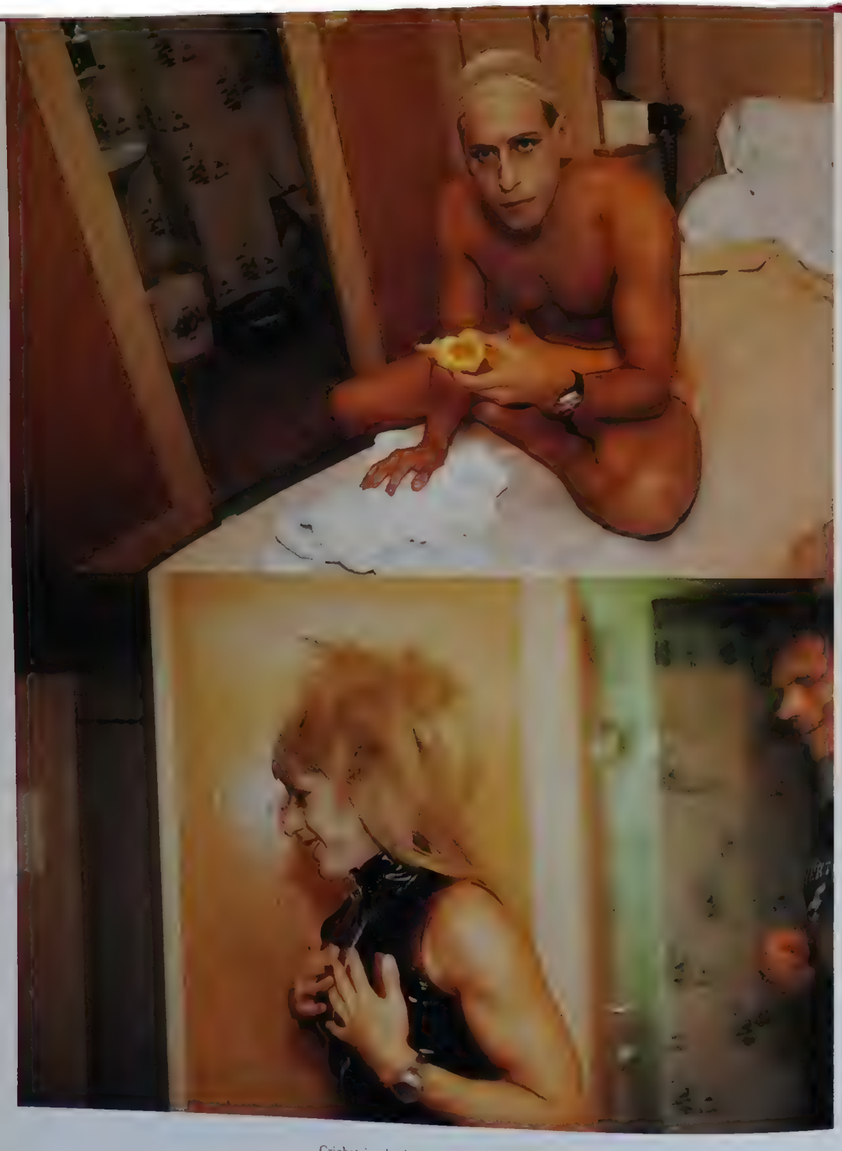
Cody at her mirror, NYC 1991.

Misty doing her make-up, Paris 1991

Tabboo! on the phone, NYC 1991.

Misty at home, NYC 1991

Tabboo! in Joey's Roadkill coat, NYC 1991



Cricket in the hotel, Paris 1991.

Cricket dressed, Paris 1991.

Misty, Tabboo!, and Jimmy Paulette dressing, NYC 1991.

Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a taxi, NYC 1991

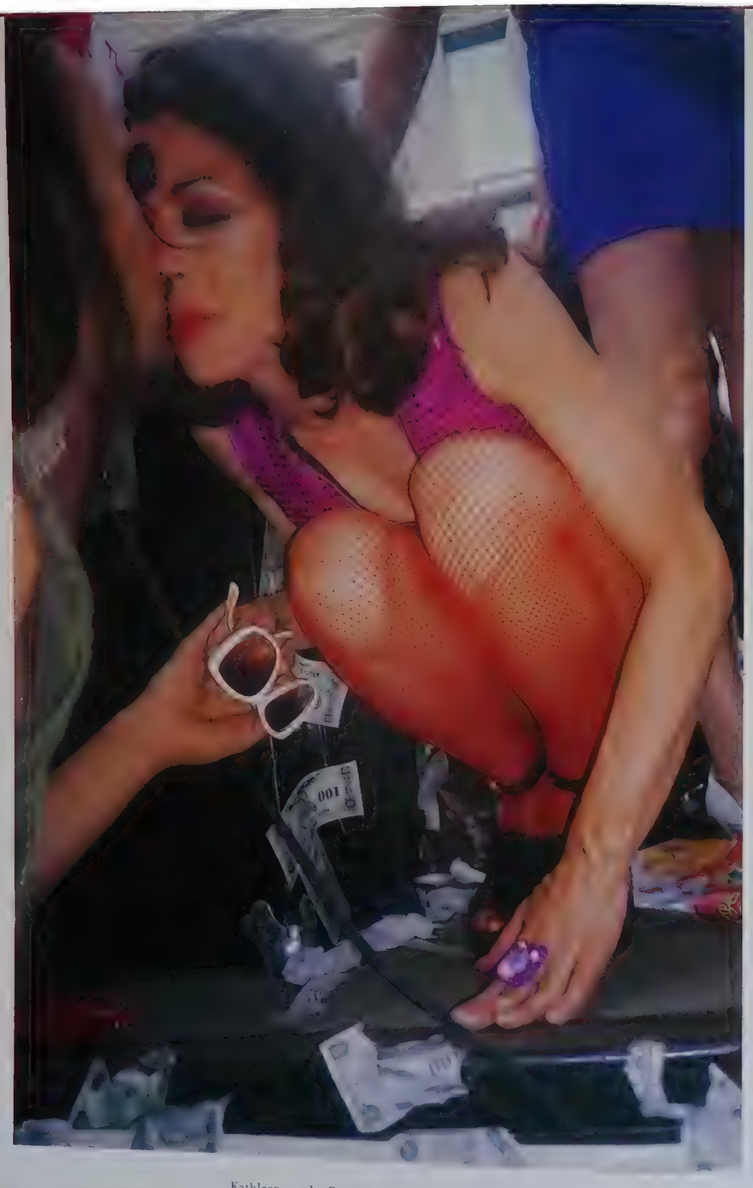
David and Mistress Formica at the Gay Pride Parade, NYC 1991

Cady at the Gay Pride Parade, NYC 1992

Misty in Sheridan Square, NYC 1991

Jimmy Paulette after the parade, NYC 1991

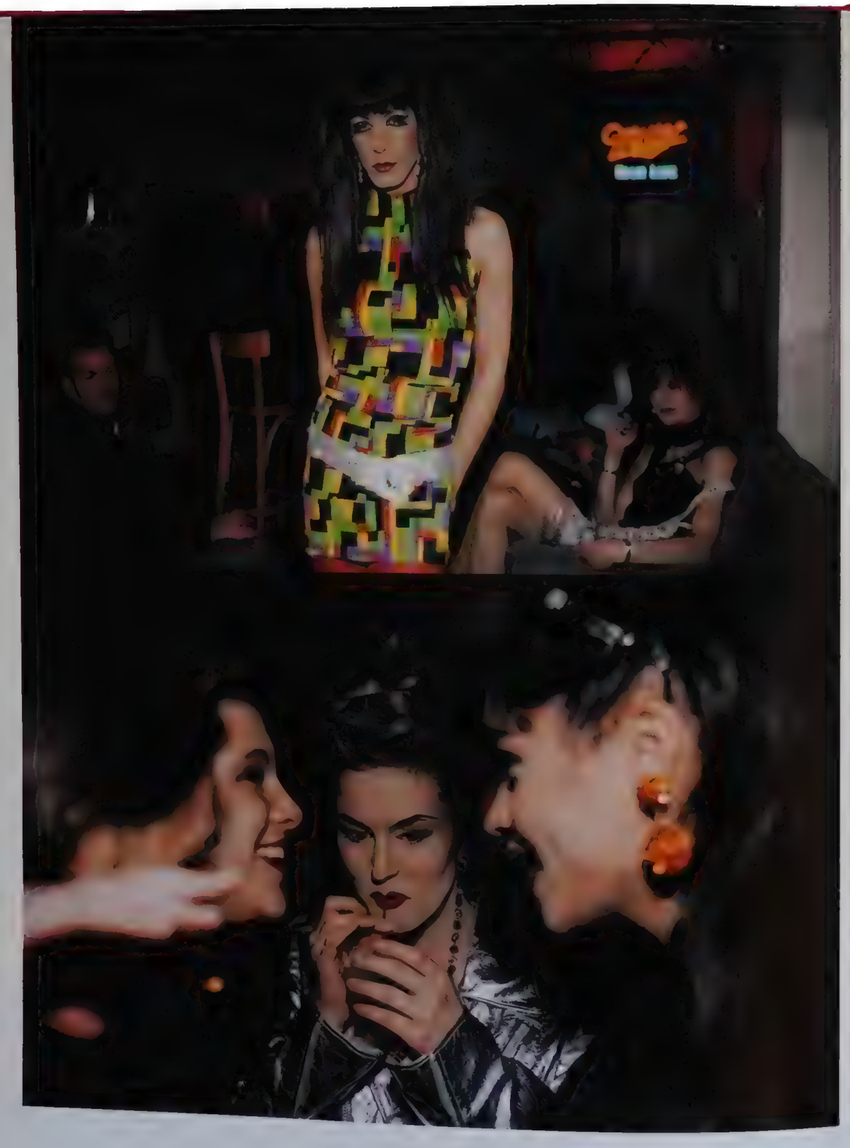
Jimmy Paulette on David's bike, NYC 1991.



Kathleen on the Pyramid Club float, NYC 1992.

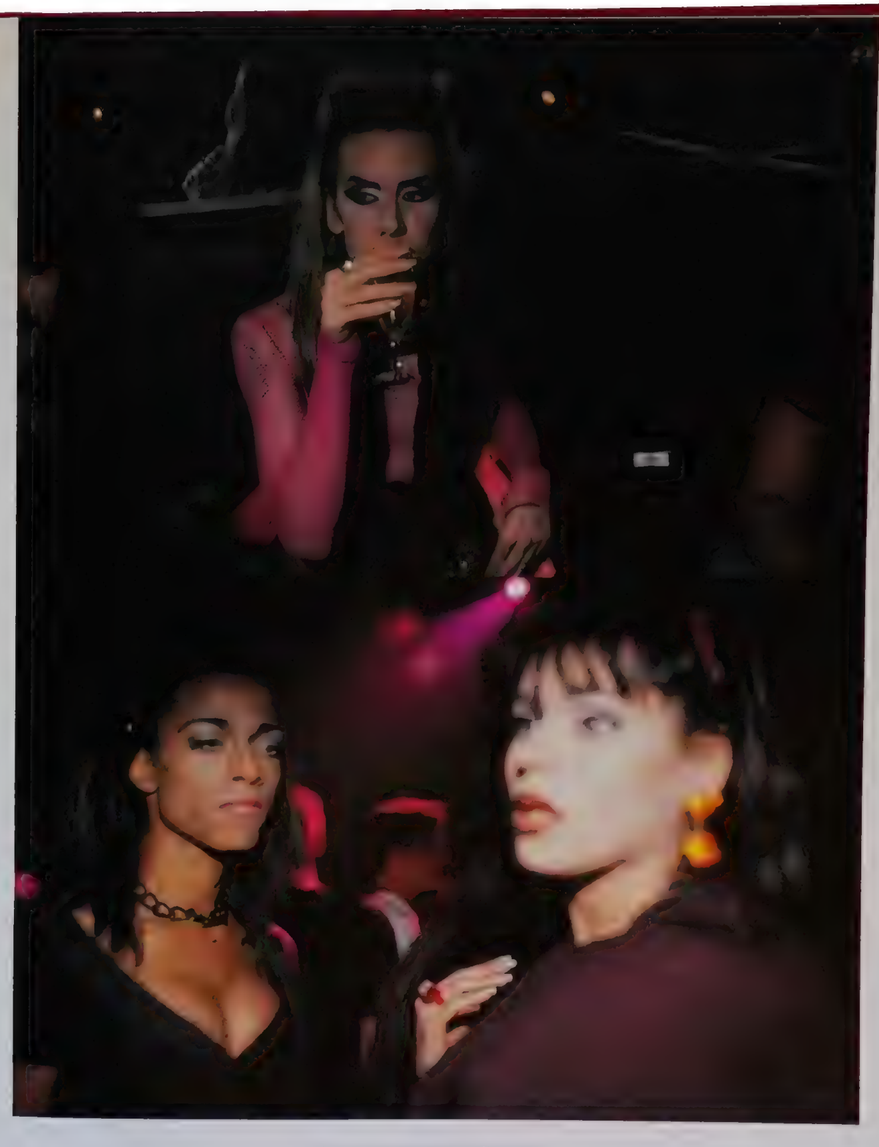
Guy at Wigstock, NYC 1991

Cody in the dressing room at the Box Bar, NYC 1984



Tabboo! at Edelweiss, NYC 1991

Cody with friends at Limelight, NYC 1991



Jojo's birthday, NYC 1991.

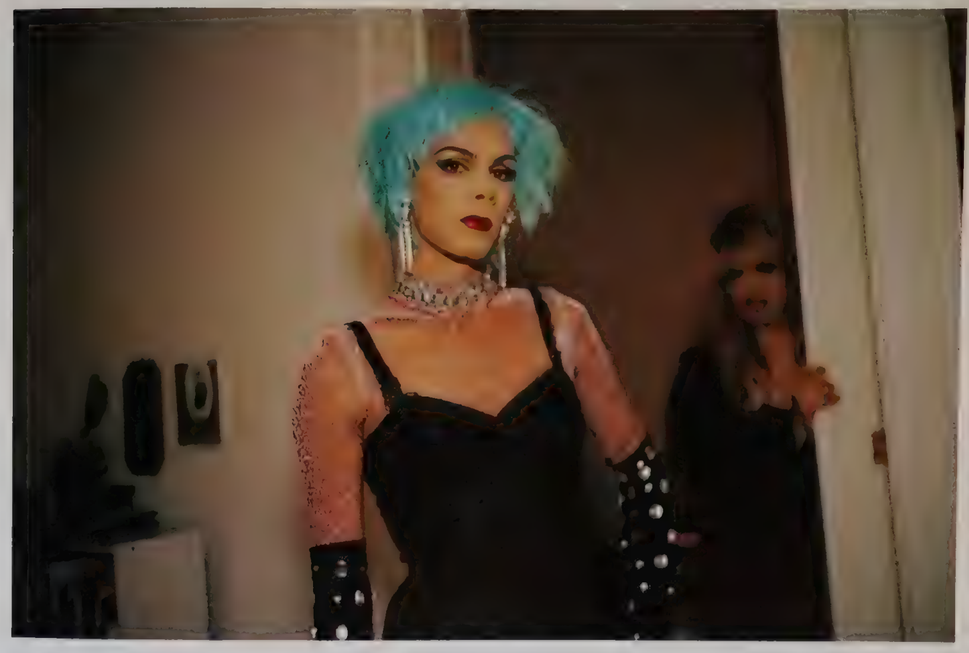
Jojo at home NYC 1991.

Guy bartending at "Love Spit Love," NYC 1991.

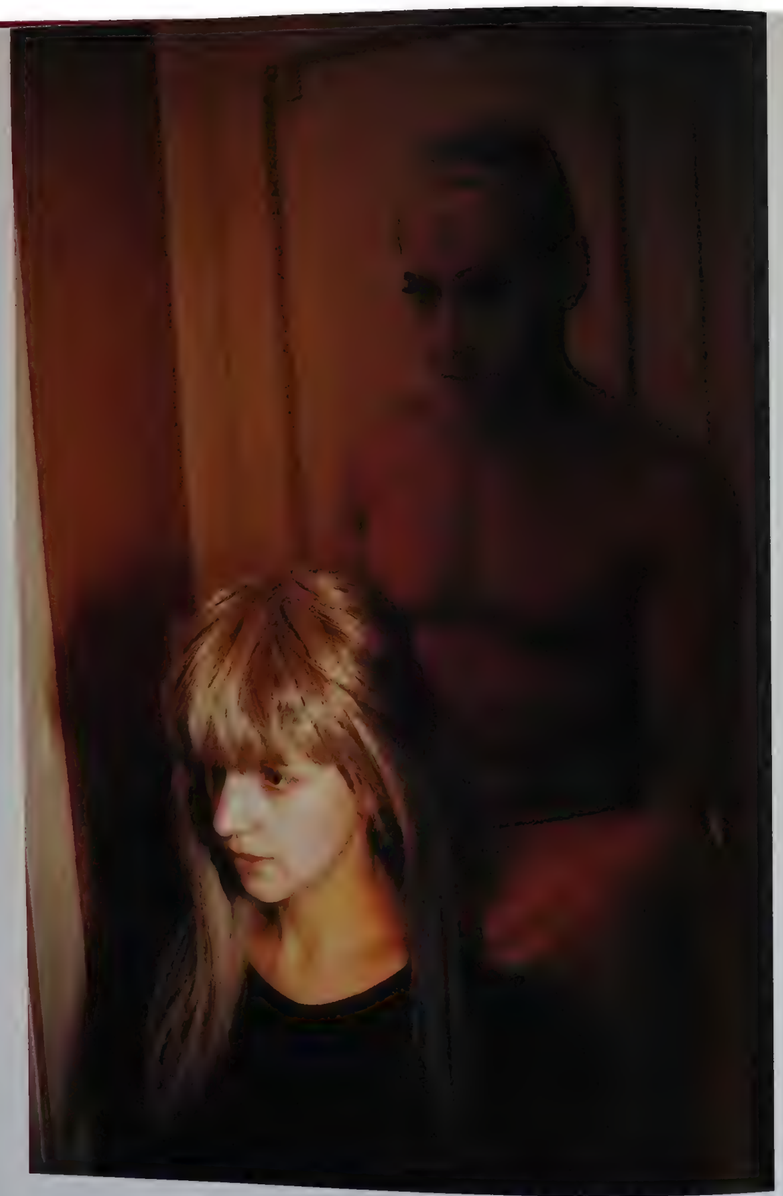
Missy selling wigs, Patricia Fields, NYC 1992.

Jojo and Guy performing "Cherrybomb" New Year's Eve, NYC 1990/1991

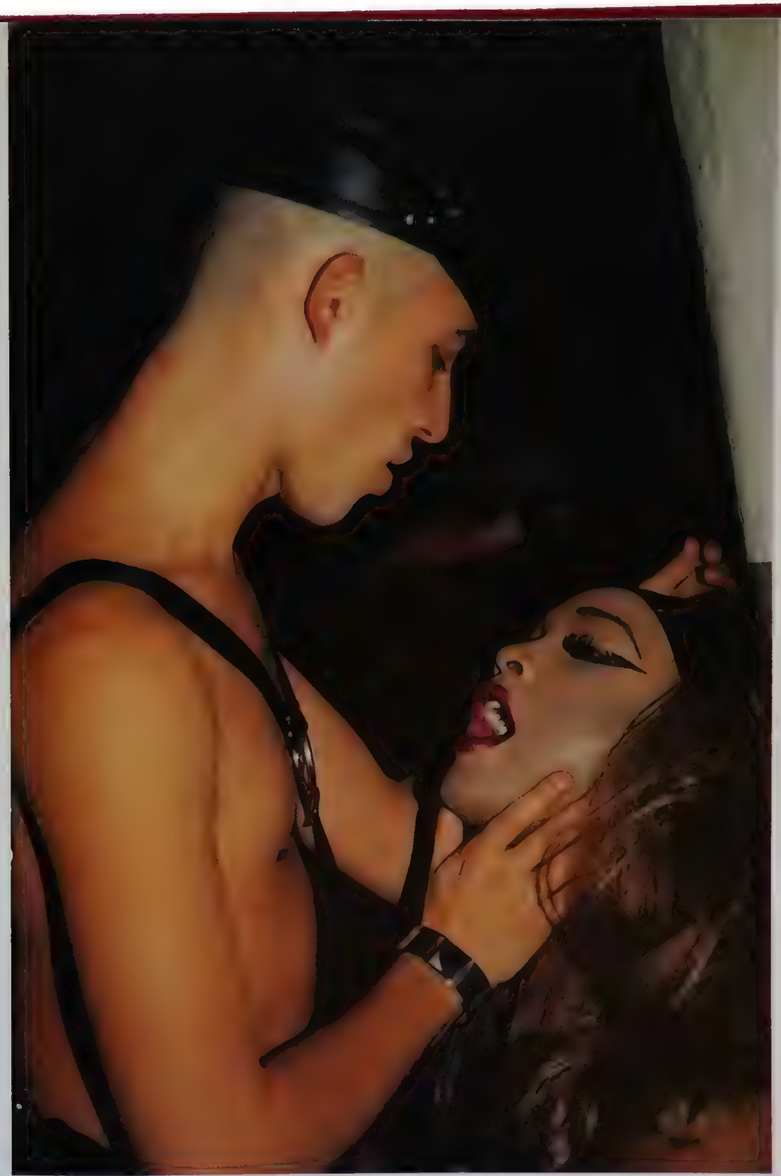
Cody at home, NYC 1991



Misty and boy at Hornstrasse, Berlin 1992



Cricket trying a wig on Siobhan, Paris 1991.



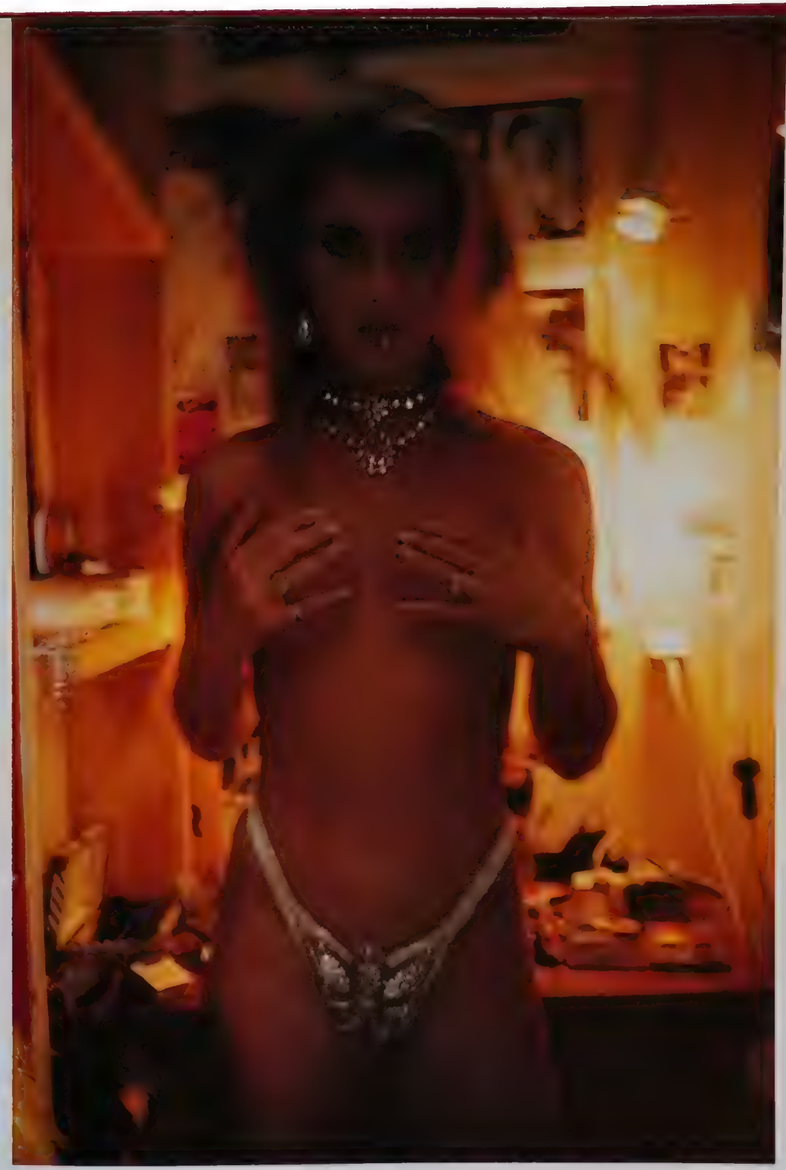
Aphrodite and Javier at a sex party, NYC 1991

Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! undressing, NYC 1991.

Tabboo! and Misty at the pier NYC 1991

Kim in a café, Paris 1992.

Kim at home, Paris 1992.



Kim in rhinestones, Paris 1991

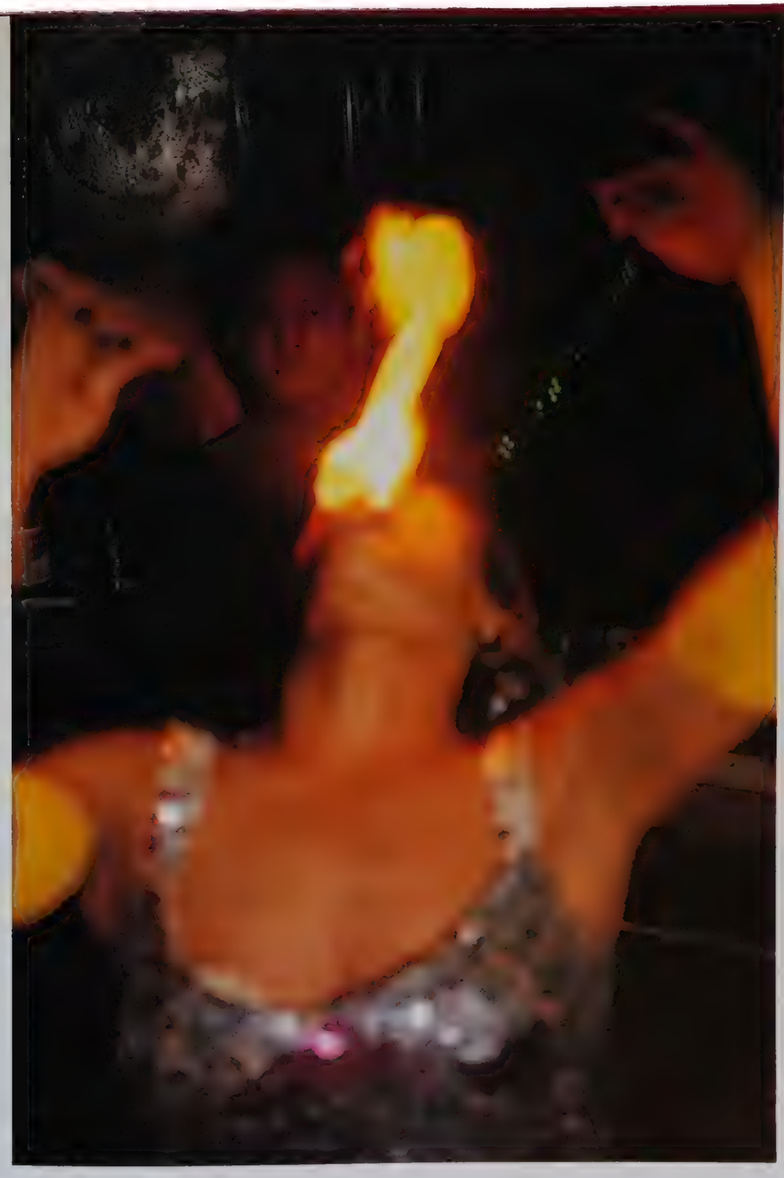
Kim in her dressing room at Le Carousel de Paris, Paris 1991.

Kim between sets, Paris 1991

The Queen and I | Manila 1992

Mother Bait and Ben David at Monokel, Manila 1992

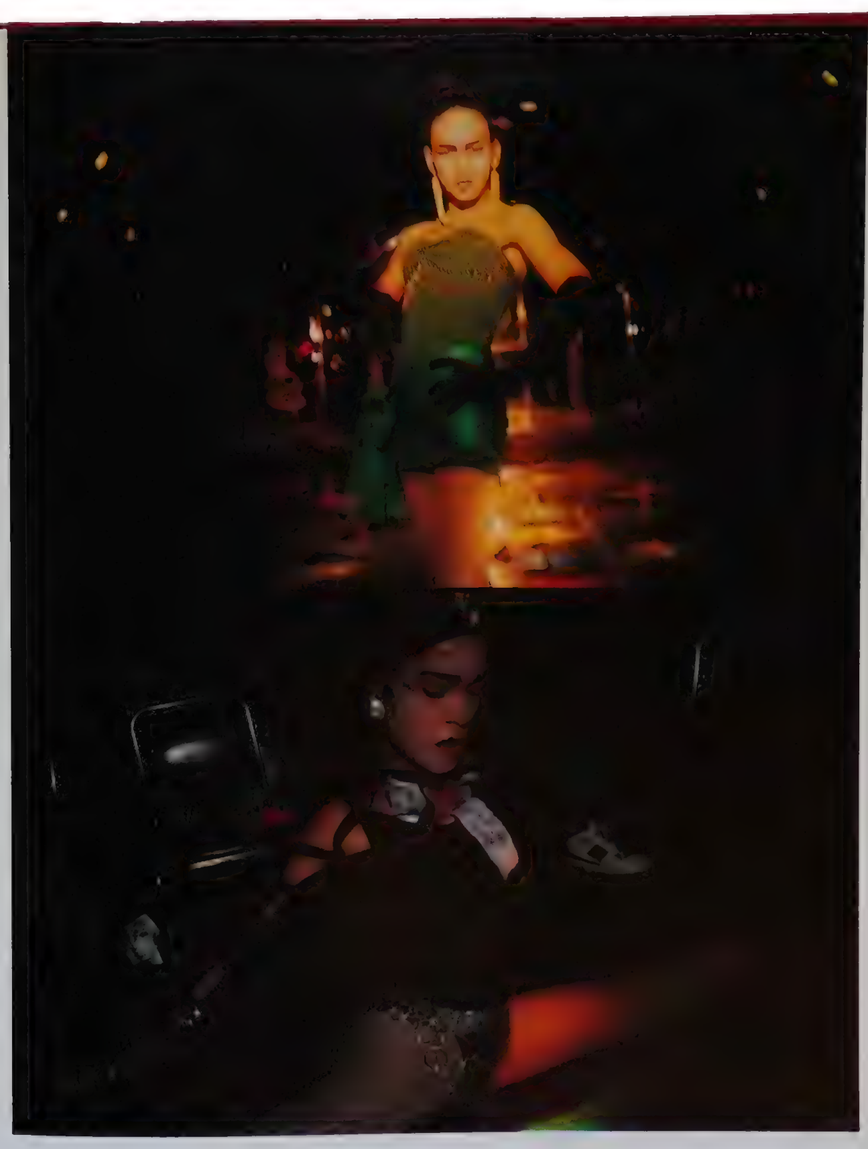
Lala onstage, Manila 1992.



Queen swallowing fire, Manila 1992

Topless dancer at International Caribbean, Manila 1992.

Fire eater onstage, Monokel, Manila 1992



Whitney's show at International [illegible] Manila 1992

Claudia doing a split, Monokel, Manila 1992

Dressing room at I. C., Manila 1992.

After the show at I. C., Manila 1992.

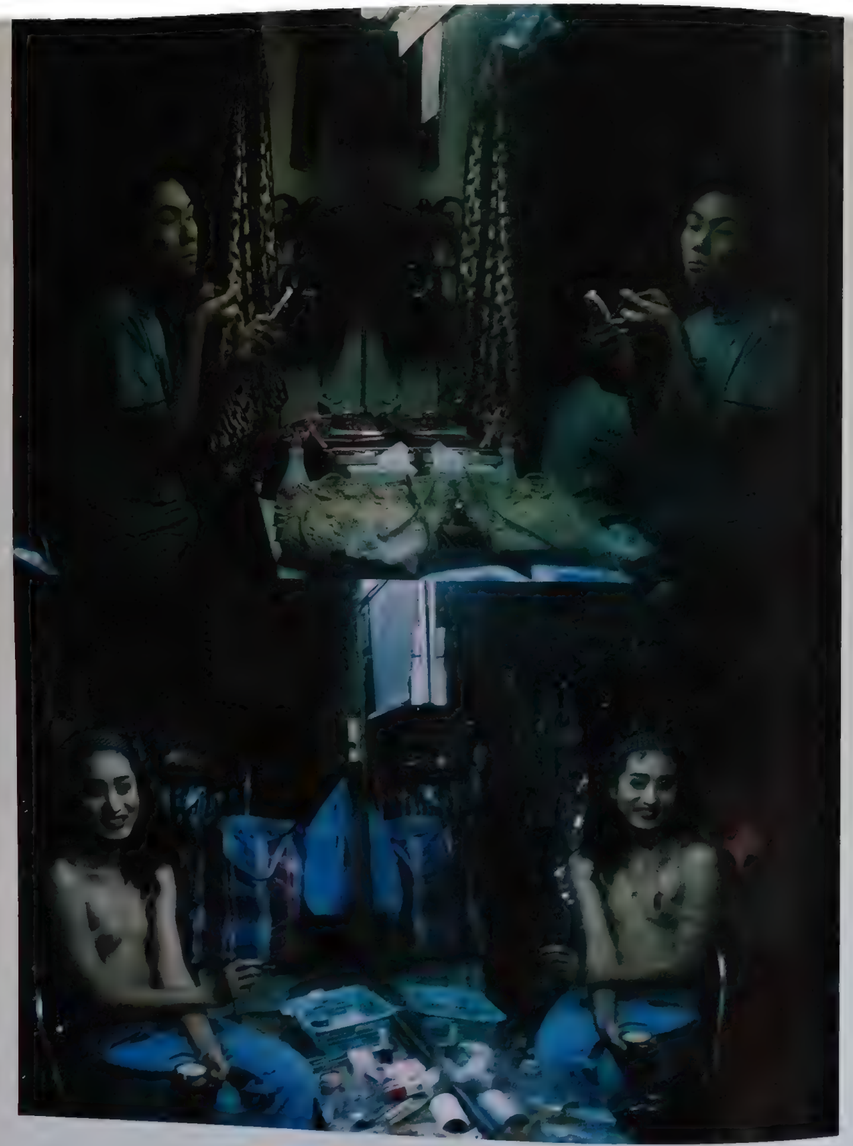
Anna at home with her family, Pateros, Manila 1992

Whitney and her sister in the dressing room. Manila 1992.

Anna and Whitney at the Taal volcano, Tagaytay 1992.

| Second Tip, Bangkok 1992

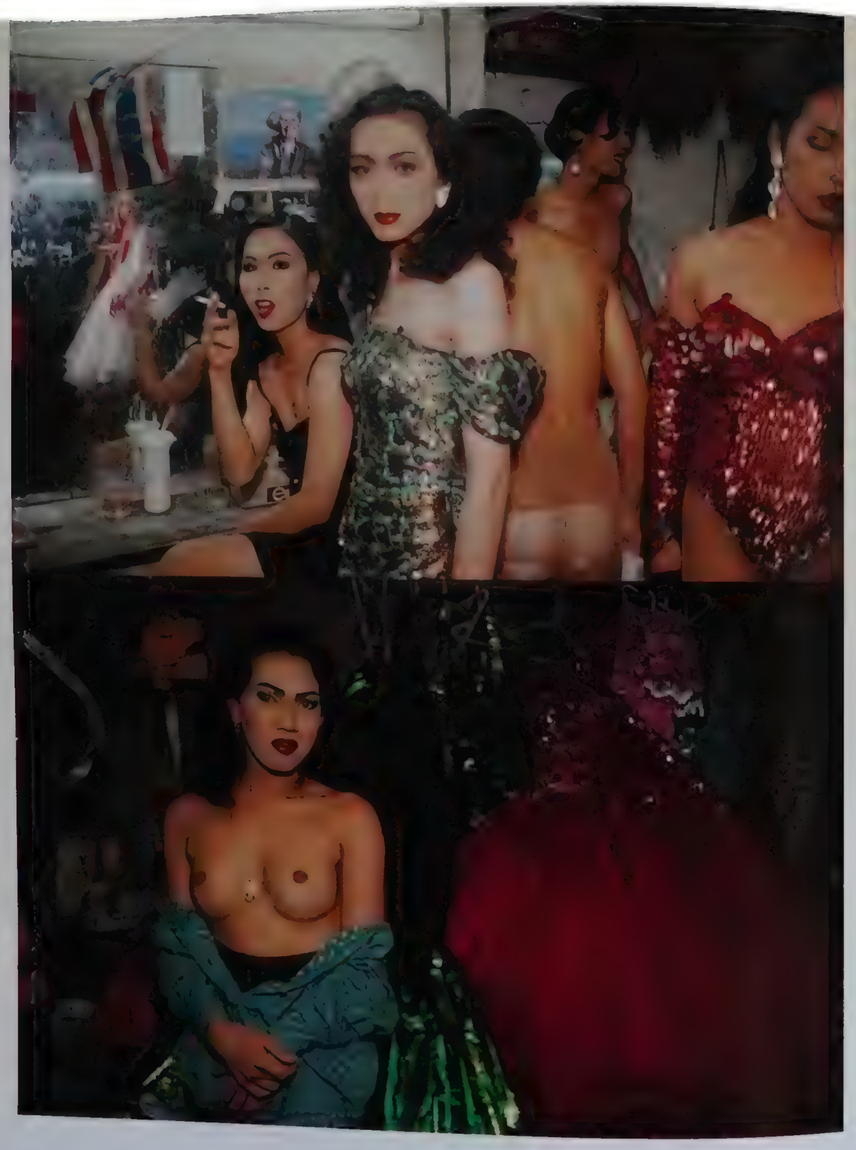
C putting on her makeup at Second Tip, Bangkok 1992



So in the mirror, Bangkok 1992

Yogo laughing, Bangkok 1992

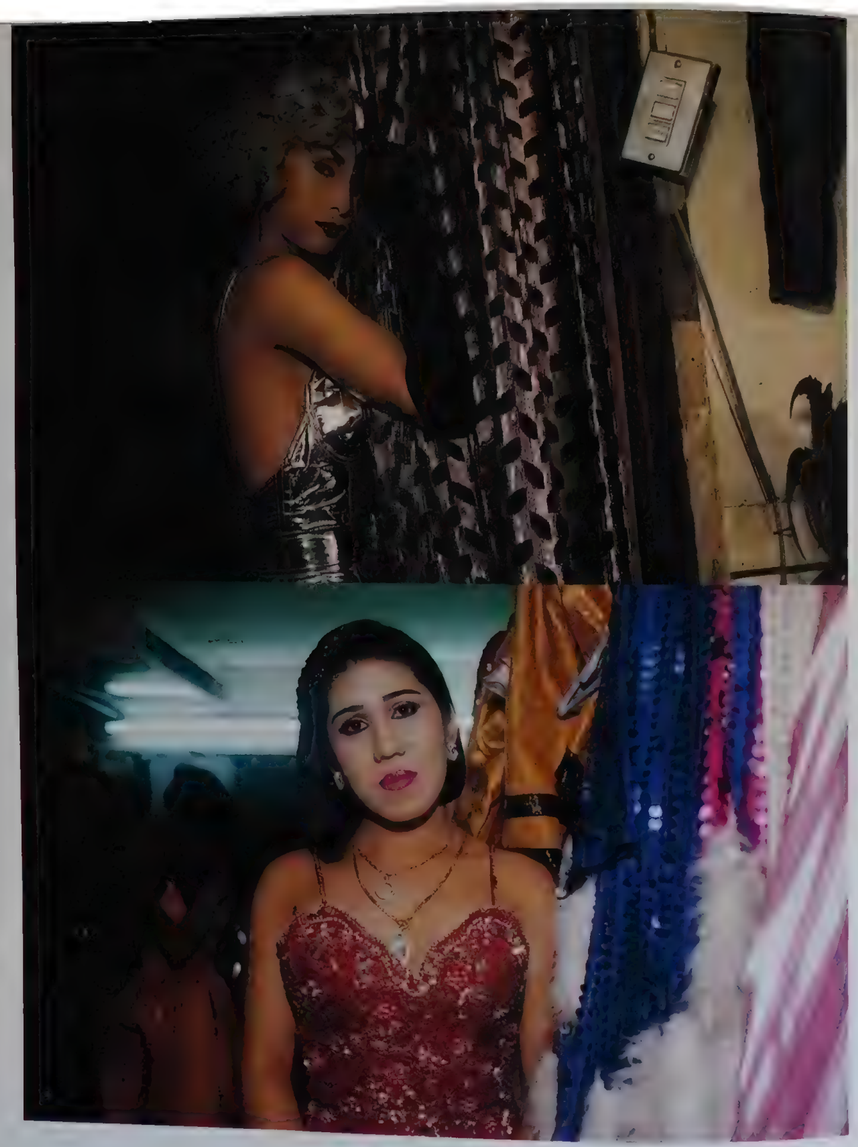
Yogo in the mirror, Bangkok 1992



After the show, Bangkok 1992.

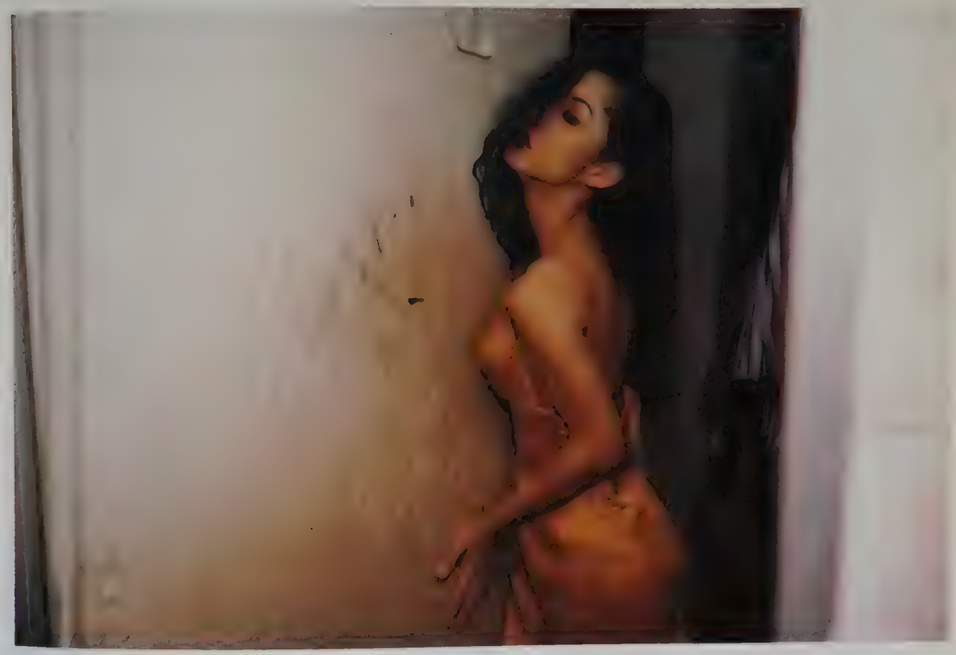
Topless queen, Bangkok 1992

C in the dressing room, Bangkok 1992



C as Madonna in the dressing room, Bangkok 1992

Showgirl, Bangkok 1992



C in the mirror, Bangkok 1992

Toon at the bar, Bangkok 1992

Ging at the bar, Bangkok 1992

C with her boyfriend, Bangkok 1992

Between shows at Second Tip, Bangkok 1992

Yogo modeling onstage, Bangkok 1992.

Toon, So, and Yogo onstage, Bangkok 1992

Empty stage, Bangkok 1992

Onstage, Bangkok [illegible]

Santi with his portrait as a young queen, Bangkok 1992.

Santi's room, Bangkok 1992

Joey | New York and Berlin 1991-1992

Joey in my mirror, Berlin 1992

Joey in the mirror, NYC 1991

Joey at home, NYC 1991

Joey dressed for Wigstock, NYC 1991

Joey at the Love Ball, NYC 1991

Joey and Bruce at Thai restaurant, NYC 1991

Joey and Niall in the limo, NYC 1991

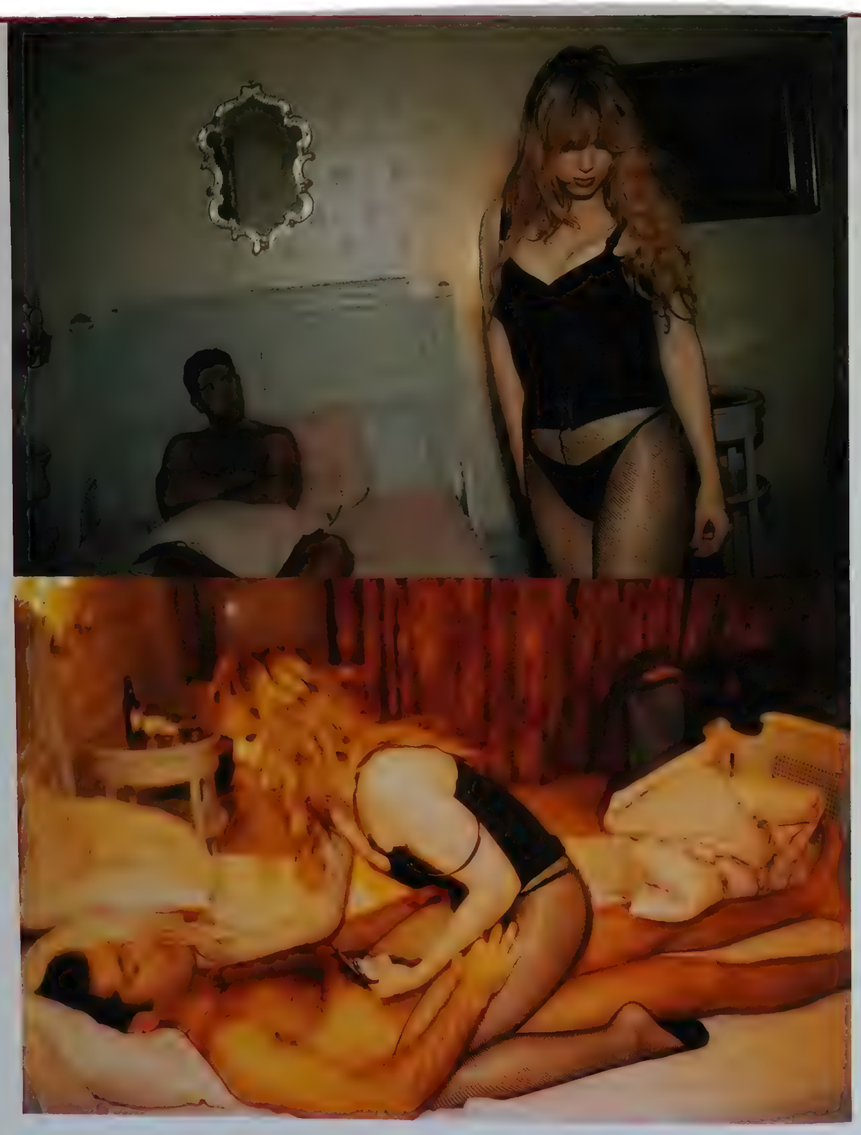
David with Joey at Edelweiss, NYC 1991

Joey and David at Spaghetteria, NYC

Joey on my roof, NYC 1991

Joey and Andres on Oranienstrasse, Berlin 1992.

Joey laughing. Berlin 1992



Joey and Andres in Hotel Askanischer Hof, Berlin 1992

Joey and Andres in bed, Berlin 1992.

Joey and Andres after [illegible] Berlin 1992

Special thanks to

Joachim Sartorius – for initiating this book, for his visual acuity, and for his rare appreciation of the beauty of drag queens.

Walter Keller – my publisher, editor and brother, for his invaluable appreciation of images and the enormous amount of time he gave this project.

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And most of all to everyone in this book and all the other people I've known who have braved the gender borders. With all my love and respect — thank you.

NAN GOLDIN, BERLIN, JANUARY 1993

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The Other Side, Boston 1992. Photo: Shellburne Thurber.

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